

The Light of the World



Weeds – including ivy, often used to symbolise eternal life - are growing across a door in the wall that clearly has not been opened for a long time...



...and someone is knocking on the door; will it be opened? And if so, by whom?

There is something utterly compelling about this scene; everyone can imagine an individual and personal version of what might happen next; and this must be precisely what the Victorian artist Holman Hunt intended when he painted *The Light of the World*, inspired by a verse in the book of Revelation:

"...I stand at the door, and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I shall come in to him, and dine with him, and he with me." (*Rev. 3:20*)

For yes, it is Christ who is knocking on the door; the door of the soul.

Holman Hunt's painting is loved by Christians all over the world, and his design has been imitated and re-interpreted many times by stained glass artists. Here, in the north west corner of our church, we have our own version, in a memorial window.



Light plays such an important part in Christianity. In the final section of our Parish communion service, we say together a prayer that contains the line:

‘May we...whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.’

If we are open enough to receive light from the Holy Spirit, then we can in turn give light to the world – a truly interactive process. A few lines earlier, this same prayer begins:

‘Father of all, we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home.’

This striking image: ‘...you met us in your Son...’ is at the very heart of the Christian faith. We are reminded of the moment in the parable of the prodigal son when the father runs to greet his long lost child with a warm embrace (Luke 15: 20). In utter misery, and facing starvation, the boy has realised that his only hope is to face up to the situation, return home, and throw himself on his father’s mercy. In Holman Hunt’s *Light of the World*, Christ has been sent to ‘meet us’ and ‘bring us home’, and he is portrayed in the very act of knocking on the door. But it is up to each one of us to make the decision whether or not to respond to his knock.